

REMARKS

Claims 1, 2 and 4-8 are now present in this application.

Claim 1 has been amended, claim 3 has been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer of the subject matter contained therein, and claims 7 and 8 have been presented. Reconsideration of the application, as amended, is respectfully requested.

Claims 1, 2 and 4-6 stand rejected under 35 USC 103 as being unpatentable over OKUMOTO, U.S. Patent 4,635,648 in view of either Japanese document 5-70422 or Japanese document 4-73992. These rejections are respectfully traversed.

Claim 3 stands rejected under 35 USC 103 as being unpatentable over OKUMOTO in view of Japanese document '422 or Japanese document '992, and further in view of Japanese document 61-224977. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

It is noted that the limitations of claim 3 have been incorporated into claim 1. As such, the first 35 USC 103 rejection should be overcome.

It is noted that an object of the present invention is to provide a shredded tobacco supply apparatus which is capable of reducing the exposure of air and shredded tobacco, which is being supplied to the tobacco band. This will therefore maintain the flavor and aroma of the shredded tobacco.

To achieve this object, the supply apparatus of the present invention comprises a plurality of tobacco feeders. The tobacco feeders have respective chimneys arranged adjacent to one another in the traveling direction of the tobacco band for supplying a shredded tobacco to the tobacco band.

The supply apparatus is thus provided with multiple chimneys and, accordingly, when a shredded tobacco layer of desired thickness is formed on the tobacco band, the quantity of shredded tobacco that needs to be supplied to each chimney may be small. Consequently, the flow rate of air that is needed to blow up shredded tobacco in each chimney is small. Therefore, the exposure of the shredded tobacco to air can be reduced.

As further brought out in dependent claim 7, at least one blower can be provided for establishing an air circulation path. This arrangement allows circulation of the air in order to minimize contact of fresh air with tobacco. Thus, the circulating air currents are saturated with the flavor and aroma of the shredded tobacco whereby the exposure of the shredded tobacco to air can be efficiently reduced.

The shredded tobacco supply apparatus disclosed in the Japanese document '977 has a single tobacco feeder and does not have multiple tobacco feeders. More specifically, the apparatus of Japanese document '977 has the chimney of the tobacco feeder merely

receiving and supplying shredded tobacco of different qualities to the tobacco band to produce cigarettes with double-layered shredded tobacco. The present invention, on the other hand, supplies the same type of tobacco from the chimneys as brought out in claim 1.

Further, the Japanese document '977 does not disclose or suggest making use of the circulation of the air currents supplied to the chimney or the air currently used to produce suction force in the tobacco band. It is respectfully submitted that this document alone or any of the other documents utilized by the Examiner would neither suggest nor render obvious the claimed shredded tobacco supply apparatus of the present application.

Independent claim 1 and the other remaining dependent claims would neither be suggested nor rendered obvious by the prior art utilized by the Examiner. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the 35 USC 103 rejections now be reconsidered and withdrawn.

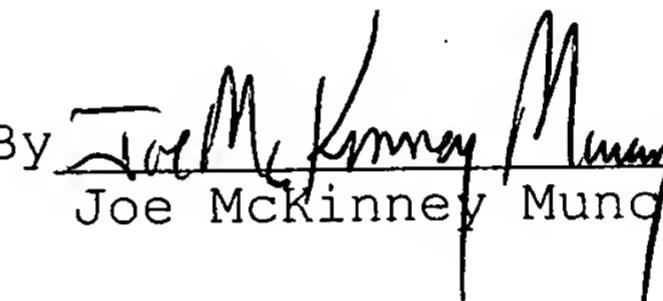
Favorable reconsideration and an early Notice of Allowance are earnestly solicited.

In the event the Examiner does not consider this application to be in condition for allowance, it is respectfully requested that this Amendment be entered for the purposes of Appeal. This Amendment should overcome the current grounds of rejection and therefore simplify the issues for Appeal. Nonetheless, it should be unnecessary to proceed to Appeal because the instant application should now be in condition for allowance.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Respectfully submitted,

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